

The Application of the Pinan / Heian Katas

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Introduction

The Pinan / Heian series are often the first katas taught in the majority of modern dojos. This can lead to the Pinan / Heian katas being thought of as nothing more than introductory katas that are really only suitable for children and junior grades. However, it is my belief that the Pinan / Heian katas are grossly undervalued and do in fact represent a coherent fighting system. It is this viewpoint that we will be exploring in this e-book.

It was Anko Itosu who developed the Pinan / Heian katas. Itosu was born in the Shuri Region of Okinawa in the 1830s. In Gichin Funakoshi's book, *'Karate-do Nyumon'*, Anko Itosu is described as being of average height with a huge chest that gave him *'the silhouette of a barrel.'* Funakoshi goes on to say that despite Itosu's long flowing beard he had the face of an innocent child. It is also said that Itosu possessed great physical strength – in particular, his grip strength was said to be exceptional – and that he was a very able martial artist.

In *'Karate-Do: My Way of Life'* Gichin Funakoshi tells us that Itosu was once awoken from his sleep by some suspicious noises coming from the gate of his house. Itosu moved quietly towards the gate and realised that someone was attempting to pick the lock. It is said that Itosu punched a hole in the door, reached through and used his strong grip to restrain the would-be thief.

Aside from Itosu's physical strength and striking power it is also said that he could withstand the strongest of blows. Gichin Funakoshi also tells a tale of when Itosu was attacked as he was entering a restaurant in Naha. A strong young man sneaked up on Itosu and punched him as hard as he could. The blow had no effect. Itosu grabbed the wrist of his attacker and, without looking at his face, dragged him inside the restaurant. Itosu ordered the waitress to bring food and wine; he took a sip of the wine and then looked at the young man for the first time. Itosu smiled and told the now terrified young man that he did not recognise him, and had no idea what grudge he may hold against him, but perhaps they could sit down and have a drink together.

Itosu was a great formulator and developer of Kata and it is said that he learned the kata *'Chaing-Nan'* from a Chinese martial artist who was living in the Tomari region. It is said that it was this kata that provided the basis for the Pinan series. Itosu remodelled and simplified Chaing-Nan into the five Pinan Katas. The Pinans also include fighting techniques from other katas practised in the Shuri region.

The word *'Pinan'* is made up of two ideograms. The original Okinawan pronunciation of the first ideogram is *'pin'*, whereas the Japanese pronounce it *'hei.'*

Wado-Ryu & Shito-Ryu practitioners tend to favour the Okinawan pronunciation of 'Pinan', whereas Shotokan stylists favour the Japanese pronunciation of 'Heian'. Regardless of favoured pronunciation, the word 'Pinan' means, 'peaceful mind'.

In 'Karate-Do Kyohan' Gichin Funakoshi, who was a student of Itosu's, said that the name 'Pinan' was chosen for the series because once these katas have been mastered, the karateka can be confident in their ability to defend themselves in most situations. If this is true, it would mean that the Pinan series would need to include techniques for use at all ranges of fighting. In addition to the familiar strikes, they would also need to include throws, takedowns, holds, chokes, locks etc. It is my understanding that the Pinan series does indeed include all these methods; however, it would be fair to say that these methods are not widely practised.

Of the four major styles of karate (Shotokan, Wado-Ryu, Goju-Ryu, & Shito-Ryu) practised throughout the world today, only Goju-Ryu does not practise the Pinan / Heian Katas. Master Itosu and Kanryo Higaonna were the main teachers of Kenwa Mabuni (founder of Shito-Ryu). The name 'Shito' is derived from the two characters used in the writing of 'Itosu' and 'Higaonna'. Mabuni was undoubtedly Itosu's foremost student. Along with Master Azato and Master Matsumura, Itosu was also one of the teachers of Gichin Funakoshi (founder of Shotokan). Kenwa Mabuni, Gichin Funakoshi and Choki Motobu (who also studied under Itosu) were the main karate teachers of Hironori Otsuka (founder of Wado-Ryu). Otsuka also studied Shinto Yoshin Ryu jujitsu under Yuki Yoshi Tatasusaburo Nakayama. Otsuka received his instruction in the Pinan katas from both Mabuni and Funakoshi.

As mentioned earlier, the Pinan katas are often thought of as training methods for beginners or children and therefore they are often undervalued by more experienced karateka. One of the reasons for the Pinan series being viewed in this way is the fact that they were established in the early 1900s, which was around the same time that Itosu was introducing karate onto the curriculum of Okinawan schools. Some say that the Pinans are merely watered down versions of the advanced kata and were developed solely for children. If this were the case then why did Itosu also teach the Pinans to his adult students? Also, why did he choose a name which is said to be related to the combative function of the katas if they have no combative function?

It is far more likely that Itosu had developed the Pinans over a period of time prior to the introduction of karate onto the Okinawan school system and meant for them to be a synthesis of his favoured methods. When Itosu was introducing karate into the Okinawan schools, the Pinans would be the natural choice of kata because they are relatively short. The main difference between the adults' and children's training would simply be a matter of approach. The children would be taught the solo forms, without their applications, and would perform the katas as a form of group exercise; whereas, the adults would be taught the complete fighting system. As time has passed, it is the 'children's approach' that has become the most widely practised.

In addition to the change in emphasis from fighting skills to group exercise, the order in which the Pinan katas are taught has also changed over time. In the vast majority of today's dojos, it is the second of the series (Pinan Nidan) which is the first kata taught.

The reason for this is that Pinan Shodan is generally accepted as being technically more demanding than Pinan Nidan. This difference in technical difficulty prompted Gichin Funakoshi to rename *'Heian Nidan'* as *'Heian Shodan'* and vice-versa so that the names for the katas reflect the modern order of teaching within Shotokan. So why did Itosu choose the order for the series that he did? Why was Pinan Shodan (now Heian Nidan in Shotokan) originally the first one taught?

As we have already discussed, in most of today's dojos, the Pinan / Heian series are practised as a form of exercise, and the modern teaching order of the katas reflects their relative technical difficulty. So what was Itosu's original order based upon if not their technical difficulty? It is my belief that Itosu designed the Pinan / Heian series to be a coherent fighting system and that the original order of the katas reflects the order in which these fighting methods should be taught i.e. the first stages of the fight are taught first.

If allowed to progress, a physical altercation will generally go through a series of stages: Pre-fight (verbal exchanges, aggressive body language etc), limbs coming into range (strikes, attempted grabs etc), grips being established, and finally grappling. Not every single fight will progress in exactly this way, but it should be obvious that a grip cannot be established until limbs come into range, and there will be no grappling until some kind of grip has been established. We should always aim to end fights as soon as possible so that the fight does not progress. Therefore, when teaching self-protection, it makes sense that we should deal with the earliest stages of the fight first. I believe this is the approach adopted by Itosu when formulating the Pinan Series.

The pre-fight ritual (aggressive language, posturing, controlling distance etc) would not be effectively recorded within a kata and should be something taught prior to a student learning *'fighting skills'* (see the Appendix to this e-book). Therefore, if my theory is correct, the original order of the Pinan series should deal with the initial exchange of limbs first; they should then progress to dealing with grips being established; and finally move on to techniques for use when grappling. This is exactly what the Pinan series does when taught and practised in the original order.

Upon analysis of the applications of the five Pinan katas, we can see that Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan in Shotokan) contains techniques that predominately deal with the initial exchange of limbs. Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan) predominately covers techniques that follow on from the initial grip. This includes techniques where you have grabbed the opponent and techniques to counter the opponent's grips. Pinan Sandan is a grappling kata that includes a number of throws, takedowns, locks and other grappling techniques that can be utilised when you and the opponent are locked in a clinch. As we progress through this e-book, we will see that by the end of the first three katas we have techniques that can be applied at all stages of a fight; exactly as the name *'Pinan'* is said to represent. So what do Yodan and Godan teach?

In addition to the main progression based on the stages of a live fight, the Pinan series also includes a sub-progression based upon the relative technical difficulty of the applications. This is not to be confused with the technical difficulty of the solo performance of the katas, although the relative difficulties are not unrelated. Both Yodan

and Godan build on the techniques and concepts introduced in the first three forms. In general terms, Yodan introduces some more advanced techniques and ideas – including how the concepts introduced by the first three katas can be used in combination – and Godan develops these ideas yet further to including yet longer combinations and transitions.

We will look at some examples from each of the Pinan / Heian katas to illustrate just how wide ranging they are in terms of their content, and to observe the progression in ranges and technical difficulty that we have just discussed. If you'd like a detailed look at the applications for the entire Pinan / Heian series, please see my video, '*Bunkai-Jutsu Volume 1: The Pinan / Heian Series*'.

Pinan Shodan / Heian Nidan

We will look at a few of the applications from Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan) that will help us to understand the progression which is central to understanding the whole Pinan series. The most frequently occurring motion in Pinan Shodan is the Shuto-uke or 'Knife-Hand Block'. This movement is performed in a number of differing ways depending upon the style of karate being practised. However, regardless of the exact details, the Shuto-uke's primary purpose is to deflect and trap the opponent's arms before delivering a disabling strike. Pinan Shodan is primarily about the initial exchange of limbs and it is therefore not surprising that Shuto-uke occurs so frequently.

For the purposes of this e-book we will look at two applications of the Shuto-ukes that are performed at forty-five degrees. As you may already know, the reason the techniques are performed at an angle is to instruct the kata's practitioner that they should be at that angle, in relation to their opponent, when applying the technique. The opponent has attacked with a telegraphed wild swing. The karateka has shifted to a forty-five degree angle so that they are off the line of attack. As an additional measure, both arms are brought up in an instinctive cover in order to reduce the chances of the opponent's strike landing (Figure 1). When the karateka feels the opponent's arm collide with theirs, the left arm wraps around the opponent's arm and then continues to pull them in the direction of the punch so that they are moved off balance. A strike is then delivered to the base of the opponent's skull (Figure 2).



Figure 1



Figure 2

We can also utilise the Shuto-ukes at forty-five degrees should we shift to the outside. The opponent's arm has been pushed across as the karateka shifts to a forty-five degree angle. This motion will limit any follow up from the opponent and will position the karateka to deliver a follow-up strike (Figure 3). The instant the karateka is in position, a strike is delivered to the base of the opponent's skull (Figure 4).



Figure 3



Figure 4

We can see how these two applications from Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan) deal with the initial exchange of limbs and how they ensure that the karateka gains an advantage over the opponent. What we can already see is that the first kata of the series (in the original order) contains techniques for the first stages of the fight. This is primarily, although not exclusively, what Pinan Shodan addresses. There are a small number of techniques in Pinan Shodan that move on from this stage of the fight; however all those techniques are very simple to apply. What we can say is that all the applications of Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan) are the kind of techniques that we would initially teach to beginners. The techniques of Pinan Shodan either deal with the first stages of the fight, or are simple enough to be applied by those with relatively little skill and experience. Hence, so long as we are interested in the practical application of the Pinan / Heian series and not just their performance, we can begin to see the logic behind the original order of teaching.

As an example of the relatively simple nature of the techniques of Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan), we shall now examine the function of the 'block, kick, punch' sequences found immediately after the shuto-ukes performed at forty-five degrees. Having learnt how to basically trap an opponent's limbs, through the application of shuto-ukes, the kata shows a basic combination that can be used if you've secured a grip on your opponent's wrist (when you've concluded this e-book, look back and notice how this gripping technique is simpler than the ones recorded in the remainder of the Pinan / Heian series). During the fight the opponent's wrist has been seized. Pressure is applied to the opponent's elbow using the forearm whilst the wrist is pulled to the hip. This pressure will cause the opponent to instinctively move away from the lock in order to

protect the elbow. The opponent will involuntarily turn to the side and bend at the waist (Figure 5). The kata then instructs us to seize the opponent's hair and pull their head back in the opposite direction (Figure 6). Once the pressure on the elbow is released, the opponent will try to straighten their posture. This will result in the opponent moving their head in the same direction as the hair pull, hence reducing the amount of strength required. The sudden change of direction in the movement of the head can whiplash the neck. In order to reduce any pressure in the neck, the opponent will instinctively push their hips forward and bend the knees. The opponent will now be sideways on with their legs bent. This provides the ideal opportunity for a kick to be delivered to the knees such that the opponent's legs will buckle and their knees will hit the floor (Figure 7). Remember that although kicks may be higher in the modern versions of the kata, originally they were all aimed low. The head remains controlled and the opponent is now at the right height, and facing in the correct direction, for a decisive finishing blow to be delivered to the side of the jaw (Figure 8).



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

Once the techniques recorded in Pinan Shodan have been thoroughly understood, we should then move on to slightly more demanding methods (all techniques in the series are relatively straight forward, as is required to be effective in combat) and techniques that address in more detail the subsequent stages of the fight. As we shall now see, it is exactly those kinds of methods that Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan) records.

Pinan Shodan / Heian Nidan

The very first movement in the kata deals with a surprise attack from the rear. Because you have been taken by surprise, you have been unable to deal with the initial exchange of limbs and the opponent has secured a grip around the tops of your arms. After distracting the opponent with either a rear head-butt, stamp to the feet, reaching back and grabbing the testicles etc, wrap your fingers around the opponent's index finger (Figure 9). Bend the opponent's finger back and raise your arms in order to break their grip (Figure 10). Assume long cat stance – which will position you so that your elbow is in line with the opponent's centre line – and deliver a rear elbow strike (Figure 11). A hard strike anywhere along the opponent's centreline is likely to do significant damage.



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

Earlier, we saw how the *shuto-uke* or '*knife-hand block*' can be used to redirect an opponent's attempted grab and open them up for a strike. If we have been unsuccessful at avoiding an opponent's attempt to grab us, Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan) contains techniques we can use at that stage of the fight.

The opponent has managed to secure a grip upon your clothing (Figure 12). The '*rising head block*' can be used to counter this grip. Trap the opponent's wrist (*hikite*) and strike the inside of the opponent's upper forearm using your free arm. As you deliver the strike, step backward into *Zenkutsu-dachi* (basic front stance) in order to put bodyweight into the strike and to position the body so that you are less vulnerable to being struck by the opponent's head. This movement will cause the opponent's head to

shoot forwards and turn. The opponent's free hand will also be made to shoot backward. This will prevent the opponent from effectively delivering any rear hand strike (Figure 13). The '*rising block*' is then performed. The forearm will hit the opponent's jaw as their head drops forward (be very careful in practice). This is a very powerful strike that requires little skill in the way of accuracy because the forearm is such a large striking weapon and the opponent's most likely response is considered (Figure 14).



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

The examples so far show how movements from Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan) can be used when the opponent has grabbed you. The kata also contains numerous techniques that can be used when you have secured a grip on the opponent. The third movement of this kata is most frequently labelled as a '*turning lower block*'; however, the movement makes little sense when interpreted in that way. How do you know the attack is coming? You won't, unless you are psychic or the opponent shouts, '*Turn around, I'm about to attack you!*' Also, assuming you did become aware of the impending long range attack, instead of stepping back, why not just turn on the spot as the kick will then be several

feet short of the target? Furthermore, it makes little sense to swing the comparatively weak bone of the Ulna into the opponent's leg. The movement makes much more sense when viewed as a hair-grab and takedown. Secure a grip on the opponent's hair and arm (Figure 15). Step back and turn as you simultaneously pull the opponent's arm across and their hair down and around (Figure 16). Complete the 'lower-block' to take the opponent to the floor (Figure 17).



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17

We will now look at another application from Pinan Nidan / Heian Shodan that requires you to seize the opponent. The following technique is an application of the 'lower-blocks' and punches found after the three 'rising blocks'. During the fight, your arms have clashed with the opponent's arm. You have seized the opponent's wrist and positioned your forearm above their elbow (Figure 18). Pull the opponent's hand to your waist as you rotate their forearm. Keep your forearm in contact with the opponent's arm and push down and around in an arcing fashion. As you rotate the opponent's forearm, the posi-

tion of their elbow will also rotate. It is for this reason that your pushing arm must move in an arc in order to keep applying pressure to the correct point. This rotation of the arm makes it very difficult for the opponent to resist the lock due to the constantly changing direction of the force. Step around with your back foot in order to add bodyweight to the technique and to increase your mechanical advantage. This is the application of the 'lower-block' (Figure 19). In Wado-Ryu and Shito-Ryu the technique is normally performed at a forty-five degree angle. In Shotokan it is performed at a ninety degree angle. Both variations work. Now that the opponent is off balance and their head has dropped down, you should seize the opponent's shoulder and apply a downward pressure. This will ensure that you maintain control over the opponent and it will prevent them from regaining an upright position. Step forwards and deliver a strike to the base of the opponent's skull (Figure 20).



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20

If the fight progresses beyond the free exchange of limbs, the next stage tends to be the establishment of an initial grip. As we have seen, it is this stage of the fight that Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan) predominately focuses on. Once a grip has been firmly established it is normal for the fight to quickly move into grappling / fighting from a clinch. It is this stage of fighting that Pinan / Heian Sandan deals with.

Pinan / Heian Sandan

As we shall now see, Pinan / Heian Sandan is a grappling kata that contains many techniques for use at grappling range. It is hoped that you are beginning to appreciate the logical progression of the Pinan series, the highly effective techniques they contain, and that this series of katas does indeed represent a coherent fighting system.

The first application we shall look at is how the first seven moves of Pinan / Heian Sandan map out an arm-lock and a takedown that flows on from an attempt to seize the throat, groin or eyes whilst fighting from a clinch. It is simple techniques such as these that should be emphasised when grappling in high-risk situations.

The opponent has seized your wrist in order to prevent you from attacking their groin (Figure 21). Reach across and seize your opponent's elbow (Figure 22).



Figure 21

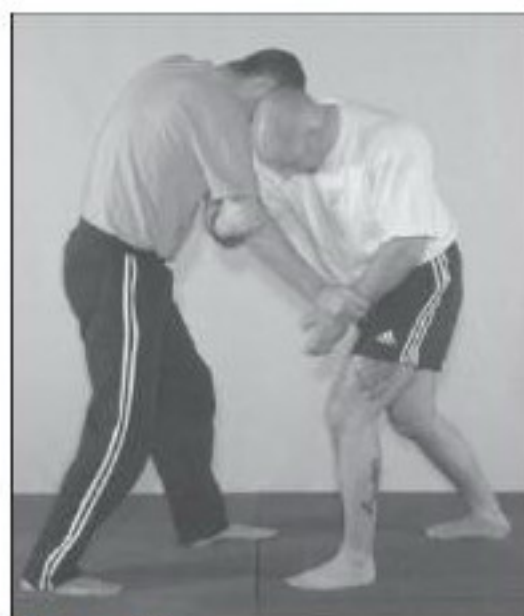


Figure 22

Rotate your seized arm upwards as you pull the opponent's elbow towards you. You will recognise this motion as the first '*block*' of the kata (Figure 23). Straighten your legs, pull down on the opponent's wrist and push up on their elbow. This will lock the opponent's shoulder. This movement is the application of the simultaneous '*lower-block*' and '*outer-block*' (Figure 24). The kata then proceeds to map out all remaining ways in which your wrist could be seized (left, right, hand up, hand down etc). It's a bit lengthy to explain here, but if you watch the first video in my Bunkai-Jutsu series, you can see it fully explained on there. Once the various options have been mapped out, the kata concludes the sequence with a ninety-degree turn to the front. This motion is informing

us that, regardless of the initial grip, we should turn ninety-degrees, whilst continuing to rotate the opponent's arm, in order to force the opponent onto the floor (Figure 25).



Figure 23



Figure 24

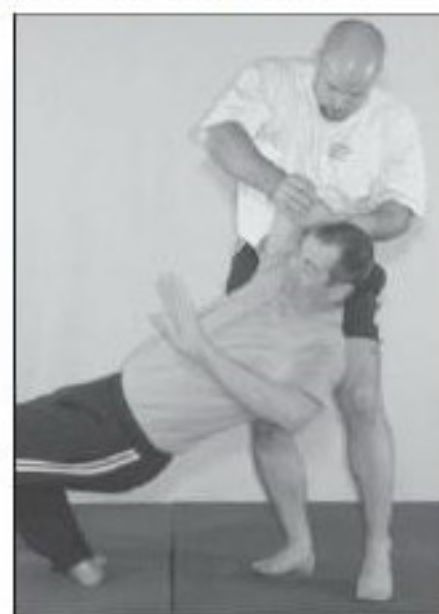


Figure 25

As a grappling kata, Pinan / Heian Sandan contains a number of throws and takedowns. Half way through the kata we have the one-hundred and eighty degree turn where the hands are placed on the hip. We then step forward with the right foot into horse-stance and execute a 'forearm block'. The application of this technique is a headlock followed by a cross-buttocks throw. We can again see how Pinan / Heian Sandan is a grappling kata.

From the clinch shown, secure the back of the opponent's head and push your body forwards in order to head-butt the opponent. On the head-butt, you should ensure that you hit the opponent below their eyebrows, with the area above your eyebrows (Figure 26). Keep a tight hold of the opponent's triceps as you turn your body and feed your right arm around the back of the opponent's neck. Pull on the opponent's arm and pull their head in towards your body so that you secure a strong headlock. As you apply the headlock, bring your rear foot towards the opponent. This is the application of the turn where the hands are placed on the hips (Figure 27).



Figure 26



Figure 27

Step forwards with your right foot as you push your hips backward so that the left side of your hip is touching the opponent's body. Pull the opponent in the direction of the step so that their upper-body is bent over your hip and their feet are lifted off the ground. This is the application of the step forward into horse-stance and the '*forearm block*' (Figure 28). It is vital that you push your hips far enough back so that they block the path of the opponent's legs. Continue to pull with the arms and push with the legs so that the opponent is taken over the back of your hips and onto the floor (Figure 29). Once the opponent's balance has been broken you should release your grip otherwise you will end up on the floor. This release is one of the functions of the following '*strike*'.



Figure 28



Figure 29

We shall now see how the end motion can also be applied as a throw (Figure 30). This movement is frequently labelled as a punch and elbow to the rear. However, this application does not consider the purpose of the turn and the fact that the punch will be around one foot short of the target. The step up, turn and arm motion are best applied as a hip throw (Figure 31).



Figure 30



Figure 31

From a clinch, strike the opponent's jaw with your head (Figure 32). Feed your right arm around the opponent's back, as your right foot moves towards your opponent's right foot. You should turn so that your legs are bent and your hips are lower than your opponent's. On completing the turn, both of your feet should be inside the opponent's feet, and pointing in the same direction. It is also important to ensure that there is no gap between the opponent's body and your own. The left arm should keep a tight grip on the opponent's right triceps and pull the opponent in the direction of the turn. Both of your arms should pull the opponent forwards, so that they are tilted in that direction (Figure 33). Straighten your knees and lean your upper-body forward so that your hips push through the opponent's thighs. Continue to pull the opponent forwards so that their feet are raised off the floor and the opponent is lifted onto your hips (Figure 34). Continue the rotation of the arms to take the opponent over the back of your hips and onto the floor (Figure 35).



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35

Although it is not practical to discuss every application in Pinan Sandan in an e-book such as this, it is hoped that the examples that we have covered show how Pinan Sandan is indeed a grappling kata. It is also hoped that you can see the logical progression in ranges as we have examined some of the applications from the first three Pinan katas. As we have seen, Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan) predominately deals with the initial exchange of limbs; Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan) predominately deals with the initial grip being established; and Pinan / Heian Sandan covers techniques to be used when fighting from a clinch. So what do Yodan and Godan cover?

In addition to the main progression in content – which is based on the progression of a live fight – the Pinan Series also includes a sub-progression based on the relative technical difficulty of the applications. Once a karateka is familiar with the applications of the first three katas, they will have acquired the fundamental skills for fighting on their feet, regardless of distance (we'll briefly look at where ground work fits in to the Pinan series later on in this e-book). What Yodan and Godan then do is further develop the skills acquired through the study of the first three katas. We will now look at some of the applications of Pinan / Heian Yodan and, in particular, show how the kata develops the skills needed to continuously control an opponent's motion at close-range.

Pinan / Heian Yodan

When looking at the application for the opening moves of Yodan, you will notice how the opponent is continuously controlled and how the technique requires a marginally greater skill level than the techniques recorded in the first three katas in the Pinan / Heian series.

The first two moves of the kata are identical apart from the fact that they are performed on opposite sides. The first movement shows what should be done if the opponent's right hand was trapped. The second movement shows what position should be assumed if the opponent's left hand was trapped. The third and fourth movements obviously follow on from the second movement and would need to be reversed if it was the right hand that was trapped.

We shall show the application of this sequence assuming it is the left hand that has been trapped, as this is probably the easiest to follow. During the fight, the opponent's left wrist has been seized. Move to the outside, so that you are sideways on to the opponent. Remember that a sideways motion in a kata means that you should be sideways relative to the opponent when applying that technique. Place the edge of your free hand just above the opponent's elbow joint. This is the application of the initial 'open-handed block' (Figure 36). Pull on the opponent's wrist as you push just above their elbow joint. Simultaneously shift your weight in the direction of the pull (as per the kata) in order to enhance the execution of the technique. This will cause the opponent to instinctively move away from the lock and will position their head directly in front of you (Figure 37).



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38

Seize the opponent's shoulder in order to prevent them from moving or regaining an upright position. Your bodyweight is then shifted forwards as a punch is delivered to the base of the opponent's skull. The grab and strike being the application of the *'lower cross-block'* (Figure 38).

On the application we have just discussed, you will notice how we shift our weight in order to enhance the effect of both the lock and the punch. You will also notice how the arm-lock is used to control the opponent's motion and to position them for the following strike. Control over the opponent is never lost and this is one of the key principles emphasised by this kata.

The next example we shall look at is a technique that can be used when the opponent has seized your clothing. This combination requires a greater skill level than the more direct methods for dealing with grips that are found in Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan). Hence, this particular method is not introduced until the first three katas are understood and the student has grasped the more fundamental methods. Once again, you will also notice how the opponent is continuously controlled.

This technique is the application of the sequence where the hands are stacked above one another prior to the delivery of a simultaneous kick and an extension of the arm. The sequence is performed at ninety-degrees which, as we have already discussed, means that you should be at ninety-degrees to your opponent when applying the technique. The opponent has managed to secure a grip on your clothing (Figure 39). At this point the opponent's back hand is posing the greatest danger. Seize the opponent's hand and turn to the side. This will move you out of the line of any punch and will lock the opponent's arm (Figure 40).



Figure 39



Figure 40

Notice how the turn to the side is a fundamental part of the movement that lessens the chances of you being hit whilst disadvantaging the opponent. The kata then tells us to pull the opponent back by their hair whilst a simultaneous kick is delivered to the knee (Figure 41). In the Wado-Ryu and Shito-Ryu versions of the kata, a front kick is executed and the hair pull is labelled as a *'lower-block'*. In the Shotokan version of the kata, a side kick is executed and the hair pull is labelled as a *'back-fist strike'*. Both versions work well and are effectively interchangeable. Following the kick and pull, the opponent's head is then controlled and an elbow strike is delivered to the opponent's jaw (Figure 42). Once again, we can see the use of combination techniques, which are less frequent in the first three Pinan / Heian katas. We can also see how Yodan helps to further develop the skills needed to continuously control an opponent as you move from technique to technique.



Figure 41



Figure 42

Just after the previous sequence we have the *"low-block, kick and back-fist"* sequence (Wado-Ryu version). Check the opponent's hand and deliver an open hand strike to their face (Figure 43). Rotate your arms so that the opponent's head is forced down as shown (Figure 44).



Figure 43



Figure 44



Figure 45

Knee the opponent in the face (Figure 45). Extend the leg to kick the opponent in the groin (Figure 46). Assume reverse cat stance whilst delivering a dropping elbow strike (Figure 47). Again we can see the opponent being continuously controlled throughout the combination.



Figure 46



Figure 47

Pinan Yodan contains a great many other combination techniques and I'd refer you to the first volume of my *Bunkai-Jutsu* series if you'd like to learn some more. However, it is hoped that the three examples shown will help to illustrate the progression beyond the more fundamental methods introduced in the first three Pinan / Heian katas.

We have seen how Pinan Shodan (Heian Nidan in Shotokan) predominately deals with the initial exchange of limbs; how Pinan Nidan (Heian Shodan) moves on to deal with techniques that can be applied once the initial grip has been established; we looked at how Pinan / Heian Sandan deals with techniques that can be used when fighting from a clinch; and we saw how Pinan Yodan introduces more advanced techniques and the more sophisticated use of techniques in combination. We will now examine some of the applications of Pinan / Heian Godan.

Pinan / Heian Godan

As the final stage of the Pinan / Heian system, you will see how Godan contains the longest transitions of the whole series. We will see how the kata teaches us how to blend techniques together as we move from technique to technique and from range to range. A good example of this type of transition is the sequence flowing on from the 'lower cross-block'.



Figure 48

An attempt to crush the opponent's testicles is checked (Figure 48). Quickly place your free arm under the opponent's wrist. This is the application of the 'lower cross-block' (Figure 49). Pull your arms towards you in order to cause pain and lock the wrist (Figure 50). The opponent will instinctively rise onto their toes in an attempt to alleviate the pain. Thrust both hands upward in order to break the opponent's grip. Keep contact with the opponent's arm in order to maintain control. This stripping action is the application of the 'upper cross-block' (Figure 51).



Figure 49



Figure 50



Figure 51



Figure 52

Push down strongly on the opponent's elbow as you apply an upward pressure on the wrist. Depending upon the style, this movement is either performed to the front or to the side. There is little difference between the two methods in terms of the actual effect (Figure 52). Keep hold of the opponent's wrist. Pull your hand to your hip, as a punch is delivered to the base of the opponent's skull (Figure 53). Seize the opponent's shoulder in order to maintain control over the opponent's motion and step forward to deliver a final strong blow (Figure 54).



Figure 53



Figure 54

By examining the previous example from Pinan / Heian Godan we can see that this combination is longer than the ones seen in the other Pinan / Heian katas. This again reflects the logical progression of the whole series. It would make little sense to practise such transitions if a student did not have a firm grasp of the fundamentals that were introduced by the first three katas, and the more advanced principles and combinations introduced by Pinan / Heian Yodan.

We shall now look at another more advanced transition found in Pinan Godan. In this sequence, we will see a trapping and striking motion, a throw and finally the sequence is completed with a ground-fighting arm-lock. This sequence is commonly labelled as a '*reinforced block*' followed by a '*rising punch*' and then a jump into '*lower cross-block*'.

During the dialogue stage of the altercation, the opponent has managed to secure both your wrists (Figure 55). Rotate your right hand so that the gap between the opponent's thumb and fingers is upwards. Use your left hand to slap the inside of the opponent's wrist as you drive upwards with your right hand. This will trap the opponent's hand, free your right hand, and allow you to deliver an uppercut strike to the opponent's chin. This movement is the application of the '*reinforced block*' (Figure 56). Pull your left hand back and grab the opponent's left wrist. Take your right hand under the opponent's arm. This movement is the application of the '*rising punch*' (Figure 57). Execute a shoulder throw (Figure 58).

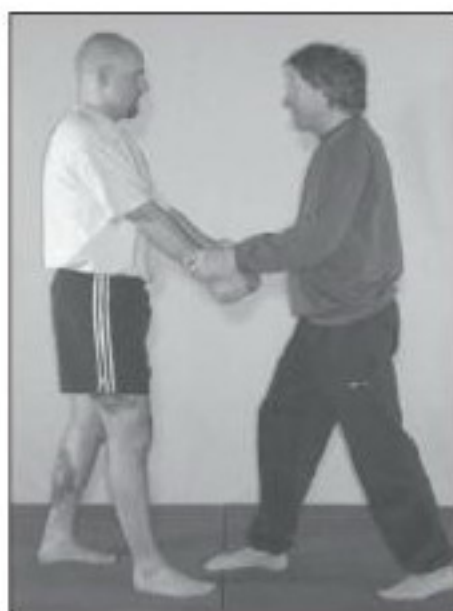


Figure 55



Figure 56

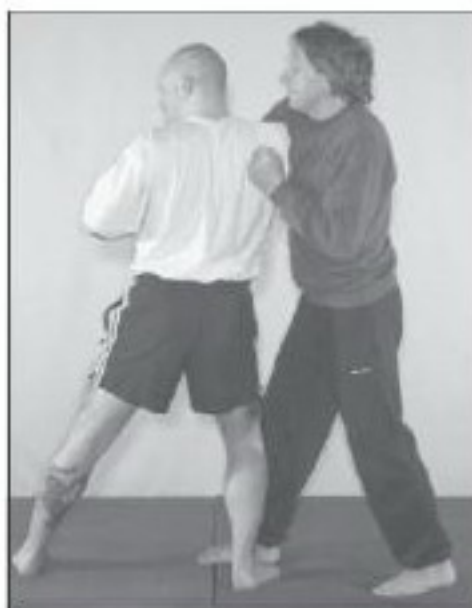


Figure 57



Figure 58

As soon as the opponent is on the floor, wrap your arm around your opponent's arm. Cut into the opponent's elbow with your forearm in order to bend their arm (Figure 59). Trap the opponent's arm under your armpit. Place your right hand on the opponent's upper arm, just below their elbow joint. Grab the wrist of your right hand with your left hand. This grip will lock the opponent's arm into position (Figure 60). Take your right leg over the opponent's body. Turn your body ninety-degrees to twist the opponent's Humerus outside its natural range of motion. This lock is the function of the '*lower cross-block*'. Notice how the reverse cat-stance prevents the opponent from shuffling around and alleviating the pressure (Figure 61).



Figure 59



Figure 60

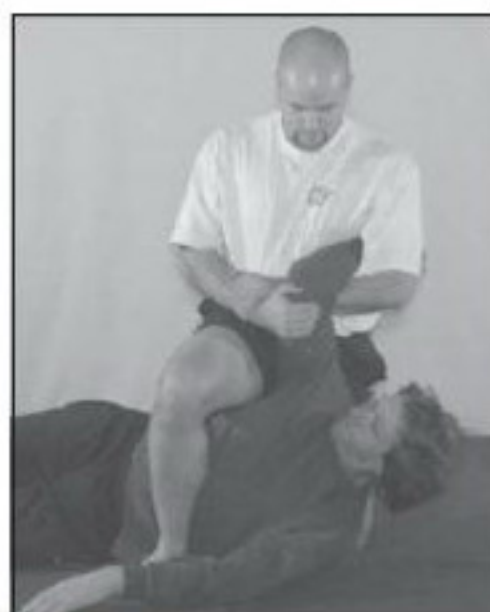


Figure 61

In this e-book, we have seen how the Pinan / Heian katas are far from the '*introductory kata*' they are often presented as and that they do in fact represent a coherent fighting system that progresses in a logical order. We have also seen how the katas cover the various physical ranges and stages of an altercation. However, one range we have not covered until this point is fighting on the ground.

The whole subject of using karate techniques on the ground is too lengthy to go into here and I'd refer you to my books if you'd like to know more. However, for the purposes of this e-book it should suffice to say that we can make use of many of the locks, chokes, strikes etc recorded in the Pinan / Heian series whether we are in a vertical or horizontal position. It should also be understood that in a real situation we should aim to spend as little time on the ground as possible and therefore the katas prefer to demonstrate their grappling principles from a vertical position, as being vertical is the preferred option and the katas always endeavour to encourage the correct strategy. With this in mind, you'll appreciate why the Pinan / Heian series leaves it until the final kata in the series to introduce the direct application of a ground-fighting technique. Only when all the preceding katas have been fully understood will the karateka have a firm grasp of the technical principles and correct combative strategies to make the use of such a technique effective and appropriate to the circumstances.

Conclusion

In the first part of this e-book, we found out that the word '*Pinan*' or '*Heian*' (same word, differing pronunciation) means '*peaceful mind*'. It is said that the creator of these katas, Anko Itosu, chose this name to reflect the fact that once the Pinan / Heian Series and their applications have been mastered, the karateka can be confident in their ability to defend themselves in most situations. I definitely believe this to be the case.

Although the Pinan / Heian katas are frequently viewed as being for beginners and children, it is hoped that this e-book has helped to convince you that the Pinan / Heian series do indeed represent a full fighting system that covers the skills and methodologies needed for most situations.

I sincerely hope that you've enjoyed this e-book and that it has helped you to develop a better understanding of the Pinan / Heian series. In an e-book such as this we are only able to scratch the surface of what these katas have to offer and I'd ask you to visit www.iainabernethy.com or refer you to my books and videos if you'd like to learn more. As is reflected in the name chosen for this series of katas, they truly do represent a coherent and logical fighting system that will indeed give us the skills we need for most situations. The amount of information contained in these katas is vast and we should be sure that we study them deeply.

Iain Abernethy 2004

Appendix: Pre-Emptive Strikes

In this e-book we have seen how the Pinan / Heian katas address the various stages of a fight. However, we have not examined the verbal exchange and posturing that often occurs prior to a situation becoming a 'fight'. It is vital that you are able to effectively manage the early stages of an altercation if you are going to be able to defend yourself effectively. As we said early on in this e-book, this crucially important phase would not be effectively recorded or rehearsed within the format of a kata and should be something taught and practised in addition to 'fighting skills'. Therefore, I decided to include this appendix so that we can understand the fighting techniques of the Pinan / Heian series in the correct context and so that we may discuss some of the issues relating to the initial stages of a conflict.

If you are convinced that there is no way to avoid the coming confrontation then your aim is to 'stun and run'. You should strike the assailant without warning and whilst they are disorientated you should take the opportunity to escape. In a real fight you must never allow your attacker to gain the initiative; there is simply far too much at stake.

You should practice your favourite punching range strike be it a right hook, knife hand, palm heel etc from a 'no guard' position so that when you are sure an attack is imminent you can unleash that strike, without warning to your opponent, and then make good your escape. It is very important to practise strikes from a natural stance with no guard because it is from here that you will need to be able to generate power in real situations. Moving yourself into a 'stance' or raising your hands into a guard will warn the opponent that a strike is imminent and as a result greatly reduce the effect of the blow. It is also vitally important to strike on your assailant's preparation to attack and not wait until you have actually been struck to begin protecting yourself!

It does not take a psychic to see when an attack is about to commence. Your assailant is likely to do a number of the following when their verbal aggression is about to escalate to the physical. Look for a change in skin colour, rapid breathing, an aggressive facial expression or stare, a clenching or shaking of the fists, pointing or pushing, a change in voice tone or pattern, excessive swearing, insults or challenges. All of the previous physical cues are caused by the increase in adrenaline and aggression levels that occur before an attack commences. That said, be aware that some assailants may appear to be very friendly at first in order to lull you into a false sense of security. When initially approached be prepared for the potential switch from friendly to aggressive behaviour as a means to frighten you and make you more likely to comply with your assailant's requests. Always try to defuse the situation by appearing to remain calm. If your attacker

continues to become more aggressive, despite your attempts to pacify them, continue to keep a sufficient distance to prevent yourself from being easily grabbed or struck. When you are sure that your assailant is going to attack, you should continue to act in a passive manner so that they will drop their mental guard, believing you to be in their control. You should then strike a weak point with as much ferocity as possible.

There are many people far more qualified than I to discuss the pre-fight ritual and pre-emptive striking (be sure check out the work of Geoff Thompson, Peter Consterdine, Jamie O'Keefe, Mo Teague etc); however, for the purposes of this e-book we'll briefly cover one way in which a pre-emptive strike can be achieved.

As the opponent attempts to close the distance, position one of your arms between yourself and the opponent. The arm should not touch or push the assailant, as this is likely to inflame the situation. Your other hand should be positioned so that it is ready to strike. The preparation to strike should be disguised so that it looks passive and does not warn the opponent that a strike is potentially imminent. For example, do not clench the hand into a fist (**Figure A**). Act in a passive manner and try to defuse the situation. If the opponent should become more aggressive and try to move forwards, the lead hand can be used to gently check their advance (**Figure B**). Should the opponent continue to behave in an aggressive way, instantly strike them using the rear hand (**Figure C**). Whilst the opponent is stunned you should escape. When facing multiple opponents you should strike the one causing the greatest threat (normally the one closest to you) before escaping. For a full and detailed explanation of pre-emptive striking I strongly recommend you read *'The Fence'* by Geoff Thompson.



Figure A



Figure B



Figure C

I'm fully aware that landing the first blow may not be palatable to some, and in recent years there has certainly been much debate as to the legitimacy of pre-emptive striking. Some support the method stating that action is always faster than reaction, and emphasise the importance of seizing the initiative in high-risk situations. Others object to the method on ethical grounds. Gichin Funakoshi's famous quote, *'Karate ni sente nashi'* or *'There is no first attack in karate'* is normally used to justify this stance. As a

traditional karateka, it is my belief that training should revolve around self-development and self-defence, and should effectively promote both. We do not wish to produce training grounds for thugs nor do we wish to fail to equip our students to deal with society's violent minority. The issue of pre-emptive striking is certainly controversial. One thing that both camps agree on is that fighting is to be avoided whenever possible, it is what to do when fighting cannot be avoided that causes the debate. There can be very few martial artists who believe that the individual has no right to fight back, the question seems to be at what point is the use of force legitimate?

I believe that '*Karate-do ni sente nashi*' and the pre-emptive strike are in no way mutually exclusive and can exist side by side. To my mind once an assailant has decided to attack us, the attack has begun and we are well within our rights to use whatever methods are appropriate to ensure our safety. Obviously we can't read our opponent's mind so we must look for physical indications that an attack is imminent. If an individual is behaving in an aggressive way whilst attempting to invade our personal space then there is a strong possibility that their verbal aggression is about to escalate to the physical. This verbal assault is an attack in itself and waiting until the attack becomes physical is foolhardy in the extreme.

In his book '*Karate-do Kyohan*' Gichin Funakoshi wrote, '*When there are no avenues of escape or one is caught even before any attempt to escape can be made, then for the first time the use of self-defence techniques should be considered. Even at times like these, do not show any intention of attacking, but first let the attacker become careless. At that time attack him concentrating one's whole strength in one blow to a vital point and in the moment of surprise, escape and seek shelter and help.*' This is exactly what many of those who teach the pre-emptive strike recommend. It is interesting that the preceding quote states, '*...at that time attack him...*' as opposed to, '*...at that time wait until the assailant attacks before countering...*'. It would seem that once all other options have been exhausted, Funakoshi had no problem with the pre-emptive strike as a means to facilitate escape. I believe the pre-emptive strike to be a '*defensive*' method in so much as it is a way to avoid the unprovoked assaults of others. Striking an individual when they did not initiate the assault would undoubtedly be a violation of *karate-do ni sente nashi*; however, I feel that being pre-emptive, when one is convinced that the aggression of others can in no way be avoided, is ethically just.

Acting pre-emptively has always been a part of Budo. In the classic text on strategy '*Go Rin No Sho*' or '*The book of the five rings*' Miyamoto Musashi tells us of three methods to forestall the enemy, one of which is, '*attacking on the enemy's preparation to attack.*' This is exactly what we are doing when we deliver a pre-emptive strike. If we attacked when the enemy was not preparing to attack, then we are acting in a manner inconsistent with the ethics of the martial arts. If, however, the opponent is preparing to attack, then we are simply gaining the initiative and ensuring our safety.

Once the initial strike has been delivered we should seize the opportunity to flee. If we continued to strike the opponent we would be morally (and, in all probability, legally) in the wrong as well as putting ourselves at risk should the opponent have accomplices that we were not previously aware of. The pre-emptive strike should not be

used to settle arguments or as a means to weaken an individual to enable us to give them 'a good kicking'. What we are taking about is the legitimate use of a pre-emptive strike, when no other options are available, to distract the assailant in the instance of unprovoked attack in order to facilitate escape. If the pre-emptive strike is used in this way than I believe it is in no way contrary to '*karate-do ni sente nashi*' (and – judging by the quote from *Karate-do Kyohan* – neither did Gichin Funakoshi).

Should we not gain the initiative, and the chance to escape that it provides, we will be forced to fight (if we are still able) and that could result in far greater violence being committed either to our opponent or ourselves. As true martial artists we should always desire to cause as little damage to our opponent as is necessary to ensure our safety. If we do not act pre-emptively, we will be forced into a position of having to ensure the opponent cannot function, as opposed to merely being sufficiently stunned to ensure effective escape.

Another vital consideration is the strong possibility of multiple opponents. If we do not seize the initiative in that situation we are effectively forfeiting any chance of ensuring our safety. When setting the standard of '*karate-do ni sente nashi*' I do not believe that it was the intention of the past masters to ask us to act in a manner that would give societies violent minority the advantage, but to ensure that we do not become part of that minority. Some would say that by striking first we are '*lowering ourselves to their level*.' I strongly disagree with this statement as when a true martial artist is forced into the position of having to use a pre-emptive strike it will be with a sense of regret. They will have done everything possible to avoid and defuse the situation and now must use force if their safety is to be assured. Compare this with the assailant who is using force for personal enjoyment or financial gain, who will feel good about the infliction of pain, and far from avoiding violence, has actively sought it out.

To my mind, '*karate-do ni sente nashi*' is a reminder for us to always avoid violence, to never fight as a result of ego and only fight to ensure our safety (or the safety of others) in the instance of unprovoked attack when no other options are available. I do not believe the intention was to demand that a woman who has just been informed by a knife wielding assailant that she is about to be assaulted, and who has no means of escape, must wait until the knife is actually thrust towards her before she may act! Striking on the opponent's preparation to attack, when we cannot initially escape, is a just and legitimate method, and to my mind is fully consistent with '*karate-do ni sente nashi*'.